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AUTHOR Makosky, Vivan Parker; Roach, James H. L.
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ABSTRACT

Psychology department heads throughout the country (1151) were surveyed to learn more about the individuals filling those positions. The response rate was 56 percent, with a usable sample of 86 percent men and 14 percent women. The questionnaire contained 35 multiple-choise items, primarily about characteristics of the school, the job, and the respondent, and nine short-answer essay questions about attitudes toward the job. Salient chairperson characteristics include these: most received their highest degrees within the last 15 years and are under 45; women tended to be younger and more recently appointed; most of the respondents are at small schools, with women chairing generally smaller departments, less often offering doctorates; the differences in department size for those headed by women are not attributable to less training for women; respondents of both sexes like power and affiliation, dislike interference with self-actualization, find personnel issues and some interpersonal issues difficult, administration and paperwork time-consuming, and facilitating department functioning important; more men were brought in from outside the institution, and may have more actual power in their positions; women are more sensitive to sex bias in language, and have fewer close relationships with department members; women were less likely to be or have been married and have children; and most respondents were white, with Protestant or Catholic church affiliations, if any. Data are displayed in tables. (MSE)

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Women and Men Who Chair Departments of Psychology*

Vivian Parker Makosky
St. Lawrence University

James H. L. Roach
St. Lawrence University

A survey of 1151 chairperson of psychology departments yielded 533 usable responses from men and 88 from women. Data are descriptive of their jobs, attributes, and opinions.

A paper presented at the Fifty-third Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association, Detroit, Michigan, April 30-May 2, 1981.

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About 18 months ago, in response to a call for papers about women in education, Jim and I decided to write a review article on women who chair academic departments. Imagine our surprise when we found that there was nothing to review! We found a number of articles dealing with the status of women in academia in general, and even in psychology in particular, but nothing on women who chair departments. In fact, we couldn't find anything about the men who chair departments, either! There was the article by Roach (1976) discussing the functions and responsibilities of department chairpersons, and a departmental chairperson's survival manual by Kimble (1979). But both of these focus on the position, not on the people who fill the position.

Scott (1981) estimated that there are 80,000 people chairing academic departments in the U.S., and that one faculty member in three will serve in that capacity at some time. Given this tremendous possibility for diversity, we decided to pursue the subject. For practical reasons, we decided to limit ourselves to departments of psychology.

Methods

Subjects

Questionnaires were sent to all 1151 people included in a 1978 APA list (the most recent available) of people who chair undergraduate departments of psychology in the United States. 646 responses were received, for a response rate of 56%. 533 for males and 88 for females were useable, giving us a sample that is 86% male and 14% female. Of these, 93% of the males and 91% of the females described themselves as white/Caucasian.

Instruments

The questionnaire contained 35 multiple choice and fill-in-the-blank items, most of which related to characteristics of the school, the job, or the respondent, and an additional nine short-answer essay questions concerning attitudes toward the job of chairperson.

Procedure

Questionnaires (with cover letters and postage-paid return envelopes) were mailed February 26, 1980. A follow-up postcard was mailed one week later. Coding of data began in June, 1980.

Results and Discussion

Data were analyzed using tests for the significance of proportions. The proportion for males was taken as the expected and the proportion for females was tested against it. Additional analyses of the qualitative data are underway, as well as analyses relating to age of respondent, type of school, and (for the male subjects) race. Today I will limit my presentation to simple descriptions of the women and men who responded.

As you can see in section 1 of the table of results, most respondents received their highest degrees within the last 15 years and are 45 or younger. In addition, women who chair psychology departments are younger, received their highest degree more recently, and were appointed to the chair more recently than their male counterparts. These results may reflect an outcome of affirmative action policies, with more new appointments of women recently than in the past. They may reflect an increase in the number of women in the selection pool. According to tables in the report of the task force on the status of women in psychology, in the 1971-72 academic year, 10-13% of the full-time faculty in departments of psychology were women, 26% of the doctorates were awarded to women in 1970, and 35% of the doctoral candidates at that time were women. Thus, the proportion of academic psychologists who are women may be increasing. There is no reason to believe that these data reflect a more rapid turnover among women than among men, although 14% women respondents in our sample may be higher than the proportion of women in the population pool.

As you can see in section 3 of the table, most of the respondents are at small schools, but women respondents chair smaller departments at smaller schools. They are less likely to teach at schools offering doctorates. These data are congruent with other reports on the status of women in academia (Ekstrom, 1979): as rank increases, the proportion of women decreases, and this is particularly marked as the type of institution changes from two year to four year colleges to major universities. The marginally significant findings in section 4 indicating a trend for fewer women to teach graduate courses only, or to receive additional pay for chairing the department, also fit this pattern. Several sources have documented lower pay for women (e.g., Bayer and Astin, 1975).

The data in section 2 would indicate that, at least on the surface, these differences in department size, etc., are not attributable to less training for women. The sex differences in area of specialization are roughly parallel to APA division membership for women (i.e., more for social, developmental, educational and school psychology) although this isn't so clear-cut for men.

The similarities of attitudes found in section 6 may reflect either similarities in the job (i.e., situational constraints) or similarities among the respondents, or both. Bachtold & Werner (1970) reported striking similarities between the personality profiles of successful academic women and men psychologists, except that the women seemed more aloof, less dominant, less adventurous, and more self-sufficient. In any event, most of the respondents of both sexes like power and affiliation, and dislike interference with self-actualization. They find personnel actions and some issues relating to interpersonal relations difficult, administration and paperwork time-consuming, facilitating department functioning important. If they had it to do over, 88% of the men and 92% of the women would definitely or probably chair the department.

The findings in section 7 probably reflect a real and not just a perceived power difference between women and men. I am basing this statement partly on the work of others, which documents sex bias in the evaluation of women's work, leadership, group contributions, etc., which I would expect to apply to actions of chairpersons as well, especially considering that the women are younger and less experienced. In addition, more of the men were brought in from "outside" especially to chair the department, which is an indication that this is a power position.

The data concerning titles in section 8 would indicate that the women who chair departments and their schools are more sensitive to sex bias in language. Both groups are likely to consult department members about department decisions, but women less often than men consider all or most department members to be close personal friends. The latter probably reflects social restraints on close cross-sex friendships.

The demographic data relating to family status in section 8 are similar to reports concerning women within the profession as a whole: Cuca (1976) reported that of women with doctorates in psychology, 28% were never married, 3% widowed, and 15% divorced or separated; the comparable figures for men are 5% never married, 5% separated or divorced. Men are more likely to have children and are likely to have more children.

There is little racial diversity for either sex, and most who have religious affiliations are Protestant or Catholic. As might be expected, women more often than men perceive discrimination. Interestingly, some of the white men who say sex, race, etc. make no difference also say that if they were black or female, it would!

In conclusion, as is the case in many fields, the male and female respondents who hold the same title differ markedly on several personal characteristics, and the women are likely to have the less desireable jobs. Women have less personal support (close department friends, spouses) and perceive more discrimination. Nevertheless, they see their roles quite similarly, and hold very similar attitudes toward the job of chairperson. For the third of you out there who haven't yet served in this position, it is gratifying to remember that 88-92% of the respondents said they would do it over again - and if you're lucky, maybe they will.

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Makosky & Roach, MPA, 1981

TABLE OF RESULTS

Items and Conclusions	% Males n = 533	% Females n = 88	Significance of a Proportion (% for males is the standard)* z	p
1 Women who chair departments are "junior" to men who chair departments.				
Received highest earned academic degree since April, 1970	32	57	5.00	.001
between April 1965 and March 1970	28	21		
between April 1960 and March 1965	17	11		
before April 1960	22	10	-2.73	.01
no response	1	1		
Was 35 years old or younger at last birthday	11	24	3.94	.001
36-40 years old	23	23		
41-45 years old	20	15		
46-50 years old	17	5	-3.00	.01
over 50 years old	28	34		
no response	1	0		
Became chairperson since June, 1978	29	47	3.75	.001
between June 1975 and May 1978	32	32		
between June 1970 and May 1975	23	10	-2.89	.01
between June 1965 and May 1970	9	5		
before May 1965	5	5		
no response	2	2		
2 Men and women differ in area but not level of training				
Highest earned academic degree completed is a Masters or less	5	8	1.30	.20
unspecified doctorate	2	1		
Ph.D	86	81		
Psy.D.	0	0		
Ed.D.	6	9		
no response	1	1		
Area of specialization of highest degree is experimental (only)	32	14	-3.60	.001
anything clinical	15	7	-2.11	.05
anything social	9	13		
anything developmental	3	15	6.66	.001
educational/school	8	19	3.79	.001
counseling	8	9		
physiological/comparative	10	3	-2.19	.05
psychometrics	3	6		
general psychology	9	11		
other	2	0		
no response	1	1		

*all % are rounded and may not total 100

TABLE OF RESULTS
(continued)

Items and Conclusions	% Males n = 533	% females n = 88	Significance of a Proportion (% for males is the standard)* z	p
3 Women chair smaller (less prestigious) departments.				
Teaches at a school with 175 or fewer full-time or equivalent faculty	53	68	2.83	.01
Teaches at a school with 2500 or fewer undergraduate students	53	69	3.02	.01
Department has 76 or more graduate students	17	9	-2.00	.05
School confers doctorates	26	14	-2.55	.02
Department has 4 or fewer full-time psychology faculty	37	49	2.35	.02
4 Although teaching responsibilities are quite similar, women may be less likely to receive extra pay for chairing the dept.				
Teaches undergraduate courses only	63	67		
Teaches graduate courses only	8	3	-1.72	.10
Teaches summer school	46	48		
Has a lighter teaching load than most others in the department	66	66		
Receives an extra stipend or a salary increase for chairing the department	46	36	-1.89	.10
5 Appointments of men and women are made in the same way in general.				
Became chairperson through a(n):				
appointment by administration, department concurring	32	33		
appointment by the administration	19	24		
choice of the department, administration concurring	40	35		
choice of the department	6	6		
The term as chairperson is renewable	52	46		
unspecified/open-ended	40	46		
temporary or an acting appointment	4	5		
a non-renewable term	1	2		
Was not a member of the department when s/he became chairperson	8 25	11	-3.04	.01

*all %s are rounded to the nearest whole percent; totals may not be 100 because of rounding and/or not listing "no response" and "other" percentages, etc.

TABLE OF RESULTS
(continued)

Items and Conclusions	% Males n = 533	% females n = 88	Significance of a Proportion (% for males is the standard)* z	p
6 Men and women share many attitudes toward the job of chairperson.				
When asked what they liked most about chairing the department, the first thing listed related to power (e.g., building the department, determining the curriculum)	58	51	-1.32	.20
Affiliation was listed among the things liked (colleagiality, teamwork, etc.)	72	82	2.08	.05
When asked what they disliked most about chairing the department, they mentioned				
interference with own achievement	19	18		
interference with self-actualization	49	46		
having to be nurturant	12	15		
interpersonal conflicts	18	19		
frustration/time pressure	16	10		
reports/paper work	34	30		
When asked what is the most difficult aspect of the job, they mentioned				
personnel actions/interpersonal relations	36	43		
general administration	24	21		
facilitating functioning in dept.	16	16		
dealing with administrators	18	15		
mediating conflicts	28	32		
When asked what is most time consuming:				
general administration	53	51		
facilitating functioning	22	21		
dealing with administrators	36	31		
paperwork	42	41		
When asked to list the most important function:				
facilitating department functioning	50	47		
items dealing with dept. colleagues (as opposed to students, etc.)	27	26		
dealing with administrators	11	16		
representing the department	19	18		
maintaining morale	17	21		
promoting faculty development	29	21	-1.67	.10
When asked what is least important:				
general administration	50	51		
facilitating functioning	16	18		
dealing with administrators	31	23	-1.63	.20
paperwork	34	40		

* % are rounded to the nearest whole %; categories are not mutually exclusive, and totals may exceed 100%

TABLE OF RESULTS
(continued)

Items and Conclusions	% Males n = 533	% females n = 88	Significance of a Proportion (% for males is the standard)* z	p
6 continued When asked about the over-all importance of specific functions/skills in their role as chairperson, they rated the following moderately or very important:				
interpersonal relations skills	90	89		
planning departmental programs	80	78		
organizing the department	43	68	4.72	.001
administering the department	68	68		
facilitating functioning	73	78		
problem solving	73	74		
If they could change one thing about the job, it would be related to				
general administration	25	21		
facilitating functioning	19	23		
dealing with administrators	31	28		
getting an administrative assistant	19	19		
getting more power	16	10		
improved resources	19	18		
Say that the administration provides needed support and cooperation				
usually or always	52	51		
sometimes	40	38		
Believes that no particular training or knowledge are necessary to chair a dept.	33	21	-2.40	.02
If they had it to do over again, knowing what they know now, would become chairperson again, definitely or probably	88	92		
7 Women who chair departments report having less power than men report.				
Has an individual/personal role in the determination of salaries of department members	51	35	-3.02	.01
Has an individual/personal role in hiring new faculty for the department	19	18		
Believes s/he has more power than most others in the department with regard to internal departmental affairs	90	74	-5.00	.001

*%s are rounded and in some instances categories are not mutually exclusive so totals do not always equal 100%

TABLE OF RESULTS
(continued)

Items and Conclusions	% Males n = 533	% females n = 88	Significance of a Proportion (% for males is the standard)* z	p
8 The personal and social environments of these women and men are quite different.				
The title used for this job at his/her				
school is chairman	48	43		
chairperson	25	42	3.70	.001
chair	6	5		
head	13	2	-3.06	.01
other	7	8		
The title preferred personally is chairman	51	30	-3.96	.001
chairperson	19	40	5.00	.001
chair	13	17		
head	8	8		
other	7	3		
The person or group frequently or usually consulted about departmental decisions is				
department members in general	48	48		
no one	14	10		
administrators	9	14		
two or more of these	18	18		
Considers all or most of the departmental members to be close personal friends	28	16	-2.50	.02
Present marital status is never married	4	36	15.24	.001
separated/divorced	9	21	3.87	.001
widowed	1	3		
married for the first time	70	33	-7.55	.001
remarried	16	7	-2.31	.05
Has no children	13	50	10.28	.001
one child, 5 or under	4	5		
one child, 6 or over	9	14		
more than one child, youngest 5 or under	13	6	-1.94	.10
more than one child, youngest 6 or over	60	24	-6.92	.001
Racial/ethnic group is white/Caucasian	93	91		
Black/Afro-American	2	5		
No religious affiliation	37	35		
Protestant	40	28	-2.31	.05
Catholic	9	24	4.84	.001
Jewish	7	9		
Believes age, sex, and/or racial/ethnic group membership makes no difference in his/her				
job as chairperson	68	51	-3.40	.001
age makes a difference	14	5	-2.43	.02
sex makes a difference	2	27	16.67	.001
2 or more of these make a difference	10	13		
Group membership effects are specified as negative or partly negative	5	22	7.39	.001

*because %s are rounded and minor categories aren't listed, totals do not always equal 100%